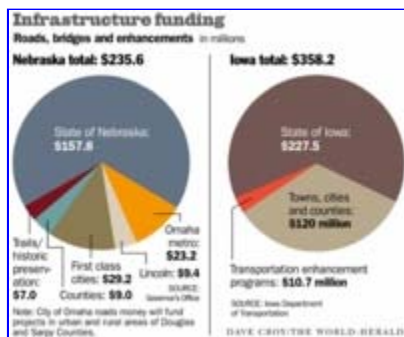


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## Heineman: Plans in motion to spend stimulus money

BY MARTHA STODDARD AND TOM SHAW  
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

As stimulus money starts to flow into Nebraska and Iowa, state and local leaders are mulling which road projects to fund.



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Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman said the package is expected to funnel \$235.6 million into his state for roads and infrastructure projects, with the Nebraska Department of Roads receiving \$157.8 million of that.

The state is seeking bids for the first stimulus-funded road projects.

The seven projects, estimated to total \$31 million, involve Interstate work near Maxwell and Lexington and highway projects near Syracuse, Thedford, Edgar and Gilead, which has two projects.

Additional projects will be advertised every 30 days until the stimulus money is exhausted.

"There are areas where we are already moving forward," Heineman said. "These projects need to be shovel-ready and shovel-worthy."

Of Iowa's \$358.2 million for road and bridge funding, \$227.5 million will go to the Iowa Department of Transportation.

About \$120 million will be distributed among Iowa's cities, towns and counties. Regional planning groups around the state will decide how to divvy up that money.

The Iowa Transportation Commission will approve all state and local projects at the state level through a letting process. The next letting will take place March 31.

In Nebraska, urban and rural road projects in Douglas and Sarpy Counties will receive \$23.2 million of the roads money.

The Metropolitan Area Planning Agency, which coordinates projects in the Omaha region, will oversee which projects are funded in communities such as Omaha, Ralston, Bellevue, LaVista and Papillion, as well as in unincorporated parts of Douglas and Sarpy Counties.

Greg Youell, transportation manager for MAPA, said the group will discuss a priority list today with local roads leaders. Omaha's wish list alone included \$87 million for street and road work.

There is no formula for distributing the \$29.2 million in roads stimulus funding for Nebraska's first-class cities or the \$9 million for road projects in the state's counties.

The Nebraska League of Municipalities will develop a list of road priorities for the 26 first-class cities outside the Omaha metropolitan area. First-class cities are those with populations of 5,000 to 100,000.

The Nebraska Association of County Officials will compile a list of county road projects for consideration for the county funding.

"When you start spreading that out, it's not going to go too far," said Executive Director Larry Dix with the county association.

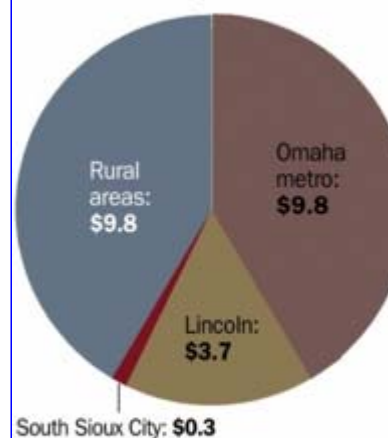
The \$9.8 million being distributed to Omaha's Metro Area Transit could buy an estimated 25 new buses and replacement engines and transmissions for

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### Transit funding

**Nebraska total: \$23.6** in millions



**Iowa total: \$36.5** (no breakdown available)

SOURCES: Nebraska Governor's Office,  
Iowa Department of Transportation

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33 existing buses, said MAT Executive Director Curt Simon. The new buses would replace buses that are at the end of their life cycle.

"Ninety-five percent of the money is going to be used for new buses or bus rehabilitation," Simon said.

MAT had hoped for almost \$20 million, to buy 47 new buses and rebuild 37 existing ones. No funds were provided for Omaha Mayor Mike Fahey's plan for a new streetcar system to serve downtown.

In Iowa, of the \$36.5 million allocated for transit projects, \$21.3 million will go to urban areas and \$15.2 will go to rural areas.

Nebraska Roads Department spokeswoman Mary Jo Oie said the federal government determined the broader division of funds.

The road money is part of more than \$1 billion that the stimulus package is expected to send Nebraska's way, Heineman said. The money is to involve more than 50 state programs in a variety of areas.

The biggest portions are designated for education, Medicaid and roads. Money also goes to programs such as weatherization-assistance grants, special education and temporary aid for needy families.

Heineman said state officials signed an agreement last week for a \$25 increase in weekly unemployment insurance benefits that will last through June 30, 2010.

Other funding will take longer to work out, he said.

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan told the nation's governors it could be a week to 10 days before the department can provide states more information about money intended to help stabilize state education budgets.

Heineman said the state would set up a Web site in coming weeks to let Nebraskans know how the money is being used. It's to be similar to the site the federal government already has started, <http://www.recovery.gov>.

The governor said he appointed the state budget officer, Gerry Oligmueller, to coordinate the receipt and expenditure of stimulus funds and will work closely with the Legislature's Appropriations Committee on apportioning the money.

"Every dollar needs to be accounted for, and Nebraskans need to know how every dollar is spent," he said.

Although some Republican governors have said they would refuse some stimulus money, Heineman said he expects Nebraska will use at least 99 percent of its funds. The only money he questioned is tied to a change in how unemployment benefits are calculated, which in turn might affect unemployment insurance taxes.

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